

STOKE POGES,

A CONCISE ACCOUNT of the

CHURCH and MANOR,

and also of the Poet,

THOMAS GRAY.

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Stoke Poges

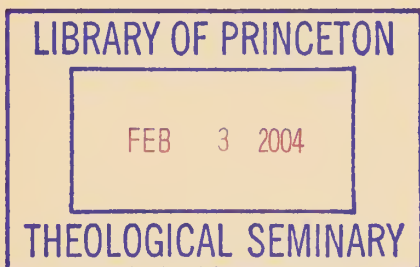
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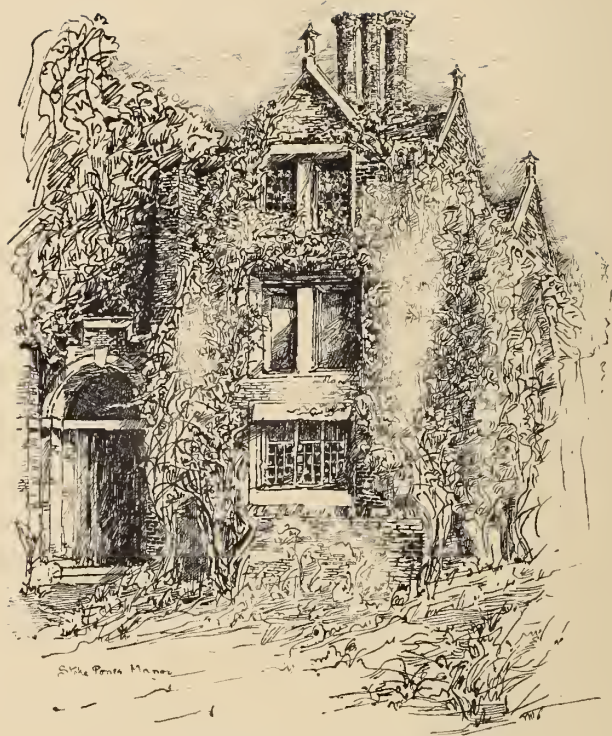
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The Manor House.

STOKE POGES.

I.

THE MANOR AND LORDS OF STOKE POGES.

IT is probable that no stock or stone now stands in the neighbourhood of Stoke Church as it stood when the manor was first enrolled in the Domesday Survey of 1086.

Therein is recorded in full the number of hides of land (*i.e.*, about 100 acres, the amount necessary for the support of a house), three arable and five pasture, held by six villeins, in addition to the forest land, which probably covered a far larger area.

William Fitz Ansculf held the manor, as tenant *in capite*—that is, direct from the Crown—at this time, its former owner, Sired the Saxon, vassal of Harold and “sokeman” (one who held land on a fixed tenure and could claim trial in the manorial court), having doubtless been ousted in favour of the great Norman Baron. Ditton was held with Stoke both by Sired and Fitz Ansculf; and until 1291 the manor was called Stoke Ditton, and appears as such in the Domesday Survey.

The land was assessed at £5 gross and £3 net

value in William's reign, having in Edward the Confessor's reign been valued at £6, which gives good evidence of the depreciation of land consequent on the upheaval caused by the Conquest. This £6 is generally calculated as equivalent to about £200 of our money, for which speculators of the present day would no doubt be ready enough to buy the property.

William Fitz Ansculf had little personal connection with his manor of "Stoches Ditton," being lord of sixteen manors in this county, twelve in Berkshire, and sixty-eight elsewhere, while his principal seat was at Dudley, in Worcestershire.

His daughter Beatrice married Fulk Paganell, of a family that owned many manors in the county, and built a castle and founded an abbey at Newport Pagnell. Hawse Paganell married one John de Somerie about 1200, and in the family of the latter the manor remained for eight generations until 1322.

Meanwhile, the occupiers of the land had connected themselves more closely with the history of the place; for from it the tenants from 1086 to 1291—the family of one Walter—took their name, calling themselves de Stokes. In the fourteenth century the manor gradually gained its present name. In 1291 the name of Poges first occurs, and in 1322 the place is for the last time called Stoke Ditton. About 1291 Amicia de Stoke married Robert Pogis, who owed his name probably to a village Poges on the coast of Normandy, near where the Black Prince was knighted; and thus the tenancy passed out of the Stoke family. Of the latter, one member, Hugh, may be mentioned, who

in 1106 granted the tithes of the place to the Abbey of St. Mary Overy, in Southwark, of which mention is made in the history of the church.

Robert Pogis appears as a knight of the county for Edward I.'s Parliament; but being prevented by some illness from serving, he was compelled to send a substitute in the person of Gerard de Braybrooke. Although never sheriff, he was a man of importance, and held two manors in Kent, one in Oxfordshire, and probably that of Arrington, in Cambridgeshire.

In 1331 a new era began for the manor. Having passed out of the possession of the de Somerie family in 1322, it was held for nine years by some one unknown. It then came into the hands of Sir John de Molines, who made it his abode. The Pogis family vanishes into oblivion before the splendour of the new possessors. The two families were, however, distantly connected, Margaret Pogis having married John Maudit, the cousin of Sir John Molines' wife Egidia.

Sir John held a high place among Edward III.'s nobles. He was made, in 1331, a gentleman of the privy chamber; in 1335 created a knight banneret, and granted the manor of Ludgershall, in Bucks. As falconer to the king he held the manors of Aston and Ilmere. He was seized suddenly in 1340 for some unknown cause, and thrown into prison, while all his lands were forfeited to the king. Six years later he was restored to favour, and in 1347 created a peer of the realm, and summoned as a baron to Parliament. In 1352 he was made supervisor of the queen's castles.

The last notice of him is in a complaint made to Parliament in 1353 for the enormous fines which he levied, after which he disappears from history, probably to die in prison; for his death remains as deep a mystery as the beautiful tomb he built in the church which he founded. His career is typical of many in that age, when men rose often—like Wolsey at a later time—only to fall as deep.

The manor in his time included Datchet, Fulmer, part of Burnham, and Cippenham. He obtained the right to erect a gallows in the manors, of which he had twenty in different parts of the country, to judge all malefactors himself, and to seize all goods of felons within his domains, and to regulate assizes of ale and bread at Stoke. Of the castellated manor which he erected there nothing remains; it was probably removed to make way for the present Elizabethan house.

The ancestor of Sir John Molines, Guiscard Lord Molines, had come over from France with Henry I., and was probably connected with the Lancashire family of the same name and origin.

The Lady Egidia died in 1367, and the property passed to her son William, and from him to Richard Molines in 1381. The last of the name was killed in 1428, while defending a bridge against a sortie during the siege of Orleans, having held the manor for forty years.

On his death the manor came into the possession of Robert Lord Hungerford, who married his daughter Alianore de Molines. She, with her father and

mother, Sir William and Lady Margaret de Molines, lie buried within the sanctuary of the church.

The Hungerford family was deeply engaged in the Wars of the Roses. Lord Robert fought for Queen Margaret at Towton and Wrexham, flying after the former battle with the royal family to Scotland, and after the latter being beheaded at Newcastle, and buried in all probability at Salisbury.

Alianore, whom Edward committed to the care of Lady Wenlock, afterwards married Sir Oliver Manningham. Meanwhile, Stoke had been sequestered; nor was it recovered until the time of Mary, the only daughter of Sir Thomas Hungerford, the son of Lady Alianore, who had been beheaded at Shrewsbury in 1467.

Mary married Edward, son of William Lord Hastings, in 1480, and received back all the huge Hungerford estates. One of his ancestors, William, had been steward to Henry II.; while his father, Baron of Ashby-de-la-Zouche, had a share in the murder of Prince Edward at Tewkesbury, and left provision for a thousand priests to say a thousand masses on one day for his soul.

On the death of Lord Edward, Mary married Sir Richard Sacheverell, an ancestor of the more famous doctor of Queen Anne's reign, and settled the estate upon him at her death. Both lie buried in St. Mary's Church, Newark. Sir Richard and his stepson George both signed the letter written to urge Pope Clement to greater expedition in the matter of King Henry VIII.'s divorce. George was, in 1529, created first

Earl of Huntingdon by Henry VIII., doubtless for his service in that "great matter"; and we find him still a faithful servant to the king in 1536, when he was sent to aid the Earl of Shrewsbury to quell the dangerous revolts in the North caused by the ruthless suppression of monasteries. The fall of Anne Boleyn, a few years later, gave this time-serving lord a fresh opportunity for displaying his ready pliancy, and he was one of the peers who condemned her. He died in 1544, and was buried, as is shown by his son's will, in the Hastings chapel of Stoke Church.

He left three daughters and five sons, the eldest of whom, Francis (the second Earl), was a privy counsellor of Edward VI., and later a strong supporter of Lady Jane Grey. But when the storm burst over the heads of that party he wisely bent to it, securing his safety by a marriage with the niece of Reginald Pole. He died in 1561, and was buried at Ashby-de-la-Zouche.

Sir Edward Hastings (the third son of George Earl of Huntingdon), however, is a person of far greater interest to us, as the founder of the hospital and builder of the Hastings chapel. Unlike his brother, he was a staunch supporter of the Roman cause, and, consequently, in high favour with Queen Mary, by whom he was created a Knight of the Garter and Lord Hastings of Loughborough in 1557. His brother Francis had been made a knight of the same order by Edward VI., and was busy proclaiming Lady Jane Grey, while his more fortunate brother was raising 4000 men in Bucks against the Earl of Northumber-

land's partisans. At Mary's death he, of course, fell from power, and retired to Stoke, where he died in 1572, and was buried in the Hastings chapel.

Henry (the third earl, and second son of George) was as zealous on the Puritan side as his brother was in support of Mary and the Papal claims. There exists a letter written by him from Stoke to the Earl of Shrewsbury; but it appears that the manor had suffered much during the disquiet of the Reformation, owing doubtless to the opposing tenets of its several lords; so that Stoke was mortgaged to one Sergeant Branthwait, to whom he owed money, and the expenses of his funeral in 1595 were borne by Queen Elizabeth, whom he seems to have served well—at least she intrusted him with the custody of Mary Queen of Scots. The old manor house was probably finished in his time.

Suddenly the long line of lords and barons is broken by the prosaic incident of a mortgage and sale. Sergeant Branthwait obtained possession of the manor from his debtor the earl, and sold it to Sir Edward Coke, subsequently Lord Chief Justice of England. While Attorney-General, Coke was visited at his manor by Queen Elizabeth, whom he entertained magnificently; while some years later (in 1600) he received a piece of gold plate, on the occasion of the christening of one of his children, as is duly chronicled in the list of the queen's presentations of the year.

Whether Sir Christopher Hatton ever lived at Stoke or not seems uncertain, Sir Harris Nicolas,

his biographer, thinking that the tradition was based only on the marriage of Lady William Hatton (sister of Thomas Lord Burleigh) to Sir Edward Coke. At any rate, the tradition inspired Gray with the theme of some of the most elegant of his lines in "A Long Story," in which he tells how the Huntingdons

Employed the power of fairy hands
To raise the ceiling's fretted height,
Each panel, in achievements clothing,
Rich windows that exclude the light,
And passages that lead to nothing.

and how Sir Christopher himself "led the brawls," and by his fine dancing pleased the queen :

His bushy beard, and shoe-strings green,
His high-crowned hat, and satin doublet,
Moved the stout heart of England's queen,
Though Pope and Spaniard could not trouble it.

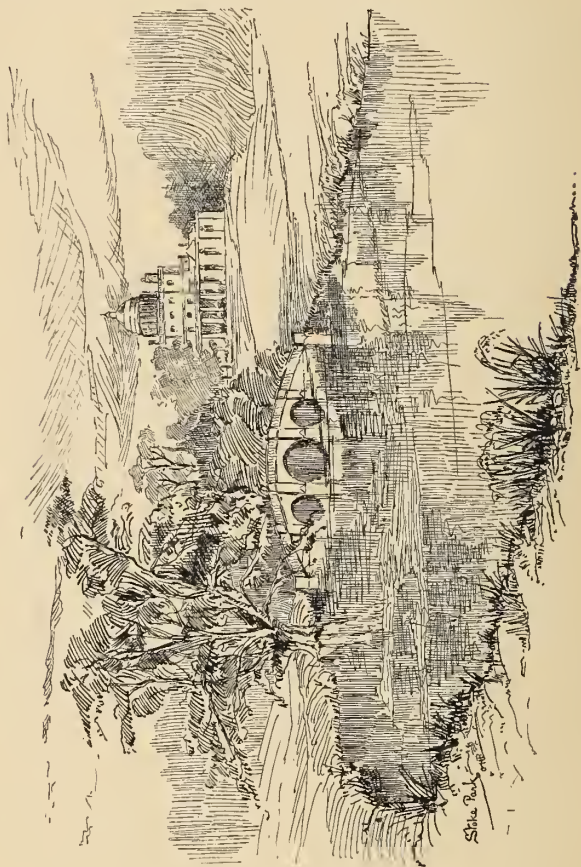
Coke and his second wife (the widow of Sir William Hatton) were a most unloving pair. D'Israeli, in his "Curiosities of Literature," gives an amusing account of their quarrels. There was an endless fight for the family plate. About 1634 my lady, "on a strong report of his death, posted down to Stoke Poges to take possession of his mansion; but beyond Colnbrook they met with one of the physicians coming from him with the mortifying intelligence of Sir Edward's recovery, on which they returned at their leisure." On an earlier occasion he is said to have shut up his wife and daughter in the manor, until the latter consented to marry Sir John Villiers, brother of the Duke of Buckingham, who came into possession

in 1645, after the death of Lady Coke. Sir Edward, in disgrace and deserted by all his friends, had already died in 1634.

Until lately the room in which Queen Elizabeth slept was shown at the manor, and contained a very fine portrait of the queen, which, with the rest of the furniture of the house, was sold and dispersed about the country before the present owner came into possession. The sale left the stately hall on the ground floor a desert. It had been beautifully furnished by the late owner as a studio for Sir Edwin Landseer, who painted many of his pictures from the park and farm.

In 1657 the manor passed to the Gayers, to the Halseys in 1725, then to Mr. Halsey's daughter, the wife of Lord Cobham, whose first acquaintance with Gray is amusingly described by him in "A Long Story"; and in 1760 was bought by Thomas Penn, in the possession of whose family it remained until 1848. Thomas Penn was the son of the famous founder of Pennsylvania, William Penn, who lies buried at "Jordan's," an old Quaker meeting-house some eight miles to the north of the church. Thomas Penn was no benefactor to the manor; he pulled down the old hospital, the old vicarage, and half the old manor house in the park, rebuilding the two former outside the park in the hideous style peculiar to the period, and raising for himself a "new and imposing edifice" after designs by Wyatt. The same architect is responsible for the two hideous monuments erected to the memory of Sir Edward Coke

and Thomas Gray in 1799—a warning to all men to leave lawyers and poets unadorned.



The Right Hon. Henry Labouchere bought the house in 1848 ; in 1859 he was created Baron Taun-

ton. From him it passed to Mr. Edward Coleman, and in 1887 was purchased by the present owner, Mr. Wilberforce Bryant.

It is worth while mentioning two other royal visits to Stoke Manor. Of King Charles I.'s visit, White-lock gives notice thus: "August 2, 1647. Army quartered at Colnbrooke, and the king at Stoke Abbey." During the summer of 1647 several places in the county received hurried visits from the king. July 1 and 2 he was at Windsor; Saturday, July 3, at Caversham. On the 15th he went to Maidenhead to meet his children, and is traced through Woborne and Latimers to Stoke. There he remained a prisoner in charge of Lord Purbeck (*i.e.*, Sir John Villiers) until August 14th, when he was removed to Oatlands.

Of William III. it is related that soon after he ascended the throne he visited Stoke, desiring to see the old manor house. But Sir Robert Gayer, in spite of his wife's expostulations and entreaties, stoutly refused him admission. "He has got possession of another man's house already," he said, "and he shall never enter mine." And the king, who was actually standing outside the gate, had to return a stranger to the inside of the manor.

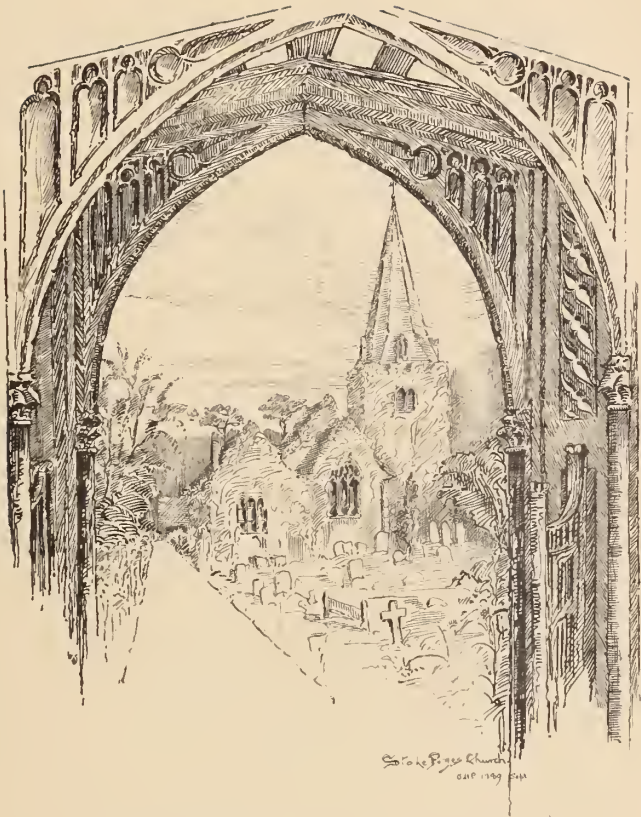
Thus the old manor house entertained one sovereign in all the state and magnificence of royalty; received another as a prisoner in the custody of his own subjects; and closed its doors to a third, dismissing him as of no account.

II.

THE CHURCH OF ST. GILES AND THE HOSPITAL.

OF the church of St. Giles the records are meagre indeed. There is little but the founding of the original building, its re-founding in the fourteenth century, and the tombs within the sanctuary, to which any certain history belongs.

About the year 1107 Hugh de Stoke and his wife joined with Aluredus, the priest of Stoke, to make over the church and tithes of the parish of Stoke and Ditton for ever to the Priory of St. Mary Overy, in Southwark. The charter is witnessed by William Giffard, Bishop of Winchester, who died 1128-1129. In 1107 William had founded the first Cistercian house in England, of which the remains are still visible in the lovely valley of Waverley, near Farnham, in Surrey. St. Giles was the eighth church so appropriated by the abbey, nor is there any reason to suppose that it was then a new building. But of this twelfth or eleventh century building there are apparently no remains, unless it be in the north wall of the chancel, in which is a blocked-up Norman window, but into the outside wall of which is built a fragmentary capital, which may more reasonably claim to have been part of this early church.



The Church through the Lych Gate.

The name of the de Molines family is connected with all that we can guess of the building of the later church; nor is it improbable that the beautiful four-



teenth century tomb in the north wall of the chancel was built for one of this name, although it is by no means evident that the fabric of the north wall is of

the same date. However, the position of the tomb makes it probable that its occupant had a large share in building the church. In 1331 Sir John Molines and his wife Egidia obtained a charter empowering



him to hold a fair on St. Giles's Day ; and as such parish fairs were always headed by the founder of the church or his representative, and as we find Sir John performing this duty, it seems probable that he re-founded the church, especially as his date agrees with

that most probably to be assigned to the existing church. The monks, moreover, of St. Mary Overy, agreed to make mention of him in all their masses after his death, and to inscribe the name of his wife Egidia in their martyrology. In 1340 he gave the advowson of Stoke Church, with all the privileges which he had bestowed on the church, to the monks, having already, in 1333, effected the exchange of certain lands in Stoke with the Priory.

Whether or not he lies buried in the tomb in the north wall must remain uncertain ; the absence of an inscription is at least no argument. He seems to have died in disgrace, and it is not improbable that he never occupied the resting place he prepared for himself.

The chapel on the south of the chancel—of which little resemblance to its original character now remains—was built about 1558 by the same Lord Hastings of Loughborough who founded the hospital. He purposed to build a chapel of stone, with an altar therein, adjoining the church, and a tomb to be raised to his father and mother and a vault for his own body. He also left £5 yearly to be paid to some learned man or men for ten sermons every year in perpetuity in the church of Stoke.

From 1702-1734 the rates show records of constant repairs to the church, and it is doubtless to this period that we owe the additions that disfigure the interior of the church—the plaster on ceiling and walls and the galleries, of which the western has happily been removed. The great square pews that belong to

some of the older houses of the parish are doubtless of later erection. May a hope be expressed that when the time comes it may be found possible to restore the space they occupy to a condition more in harmony with the architecture of the church.

Of the windows in the church, the west alone calls for any notice. It is a fine specimen of Kemp's work. In the cloisters there is some very remarkable glass,



part removed from the manor house, part collected by the late Mr. Coleman, and placed together here. The local tradition says that there is a large store of glass hidden in the north wall of the chancel, which there has hitherto been no attempt made to verify.

Perhaps the most interesting relic in the church is the slab of a crusader's tomb, unearthed some years since in the churchyard, and lately placed in the

cloisters. From the style of the inscription it seems to date from early in the thirteenth century.

Within the altar rails are several brasses of interest. That on the north side commemorates the last of the de Molines, Sir William, who fell at Orleans in 1429, and his wife the Lady Margaret. On the south side lies their daughter Eleanor, who married Robert Lord Hungerford, and transmitted the manor of Stoke to another great family.

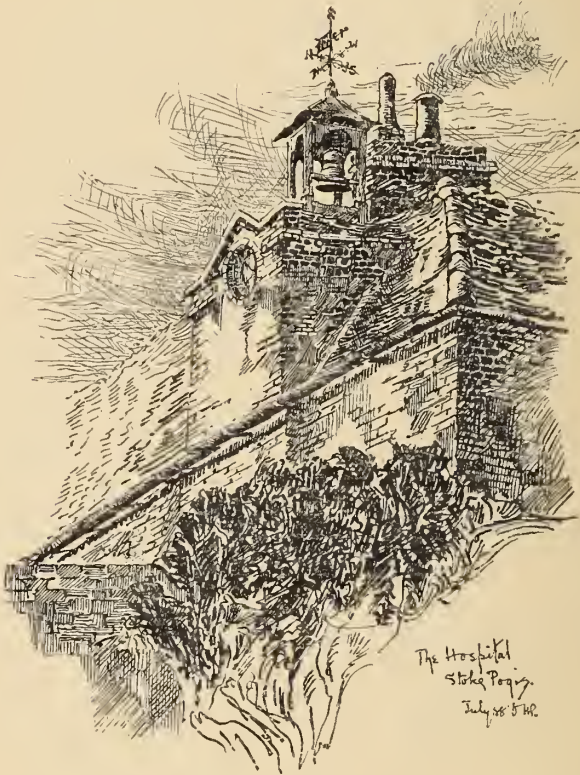
Near these lie four members of the Hampdyn family, and under the altar was buried, in 1653, Philip Gill, "doctor in physicke," tithe-holder and parish overseer.

In the Hastings Chapel, Dean Hascard, the Huguenot preacher, lies buried; and at the west end of the north aisle is, perhaps, the chief artistic treasure of the church—an exquisite little memorial tablet by Flaxman.

The living is in the presentation of the Duke of Leeds. At the suppression of the monasteries the great tithes passed into the hands of one John Dorset, from whose representatives they were purchased in the middle of the twelfth century by Robert Clarges. He again sold them to Dr. Godolphin, Dean of St. Paul's and Provost of Eton College. The Hon. Francis Baron Godolphin and his wife, Lady Anne, augmented the vicarage by a rentcharge of £48 for ever, issuing out of the manor of the Bower in Sussex; and the family has maintained a close connection with the parish ever since.

In 1557 Sir Edward Hastings (son of George, fourth

Earl of Huntingdon) was created Lord Hastings of Loughborough, and in the same year founded a



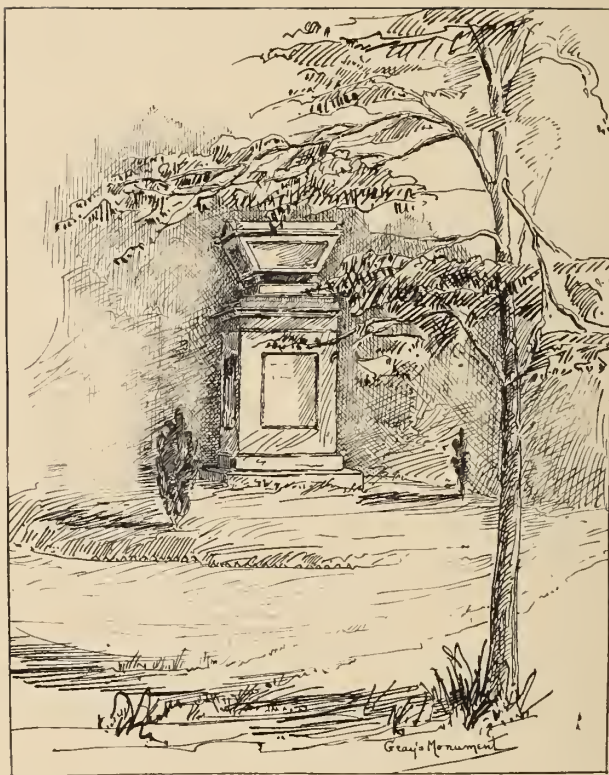
hospital at Stoke Poges to support a priest to pray for the souls of those of the Hastings family already dead, especially his father and mother, as well as four

poor men and two poor women. This hospital, with its "master, four poor men, and two poor women, there ever to pray," is mentioned in Acts of the fourth and fifth years of William and Mary, when it naturally came to pass that the foundation of the pious earl had to be modified in accordance with the churchmanship of the Restoration. By this Act the inmates were confirmed in the style and privileges of a corporation, as "master, brethren, sisters, with a common seal and perpetual possession." The master and men might be either "sole or married," the sisters must be "sole *and* unmarried." The priest was to have £10 yearly and five loads of fire-wood; and £20 and four loads of the fire-wood was to be divided among the other members. Once in two years a blue gown of broadcloth, of measure of four yards, was to be given them, with the crest of Lord Loughborough (a bull's head) worked upon the sleeve.

Of the original building near the church nothing, alas, remains. It fell a victim, like the vicarage—which once stood not far from the manor house—to the vandal zeal of Thomas Penn in 1765, who, Quaker as he was, saw little to admire in Lord Hastings' foundation by the church. Its chantry priest, no doubt, had long since been abolished, and a chaplain could as well perform his functions in the ugly building which he built about a quarter of a mile to the north of the church as in the Hastings Chapel, already diverted from its original use.

LIST OF VICARS OF ST. GILES'S, STOKE POGES.

	YEAR.		YEAR.
Alarus de Netel	1222	John Dogeson	1531
Geoffrey de Haverington...	1224	Oliver Stacey	1537
John Dryn	1228	John Munday	1555
Nicolas de London	1274	Edward Purey	1563
Wm. de Mersham	1294	Samuel Kelbridge	1592
Walter de Gippswich	1321	John Duffield.....	1601
Wm. de Medburn.....	1333	Abraham Montague.....	1620
Robert Nell	1365	Nicolas Lovell	1637
Thos. Bray	1365	Adrian Lugan	1659
— Milward	1386	Thomas Browne	1661
Thos. Chapman	1399	Roland Gower	1663
Thos. Clerk, exchanged for Leatherhead with John Gallup	1414	Robert Vill	1675
John Gully.....	1417	John Provote.....	1679
Edward Pepyng	1421	Richard Redding	1687
Thomas Howe	1454	Francis Phillips.....	1719
John Fowkes	1461	Thomas Dolben	1726
Ambrose Repyngdon	1474	William Duckworth.....	1754
Alex. White	1479	Richard Kilsha	1794
Robert Blakeloke	1489	Arthur Bold	1803
Robert Taylor	1508	S. Godolphin Osborne.....	1836
Milo Braythwayt	1530	John Shaw	1841
		Vernon Blake	1866



Gray's Monument.

III.

THOMAS GRAY, THE POET OF STOKE POGES.

INTERESTING to the students of English country life is the history of any English village, but some spots there are round which lingers the memory of some departed genius, whose spirit seems even after death to hover round the haunts he loved in life, calling men and women from all lands to visit the calm retreat made famous by his muse. Had Shakspeare not lived, Stratford-atte-Bowe would have been as well known as Stratford-upon-Avon; and, but for Gray, Stoke Poges would have been a name unknown to the world at large. Born at his father's house in Cornhill, on December 26th, 1716, Thomas Gray was the only one of a family of twelve who reached maturity. His father was a clever man of business, with extravagant tastes, and cruel to a degree both to his wife and son. His mother (Dorothy Antrobus her maiden name), possessed the good sense and kindly heart her husband lacked, and seems to have fully deserved the affection her son ever showed her. About 1727 Gray was sent to Eton at his mother's charges, and there began his famous friendship with Horace Walpole and Richard West. There, too, he gained that love for the literature of Greece and

Rome which makes its influence felt in almost every line of his poetry. At Eton he chose the student's life—"Gray never was a boy," says Walpole—and that choice he never deserted. Pembroke Hall, Cambridge, was his home for a short time in 1734, but he soon left it for Peterhouse, Walpole going to King's a little later, and West to Christ Church, Oxford. His vacations he spent at his uncle's house at Burnham, where he revelled in the beeches, and doubtless found time to explore Stoke Poges. He left Cambridge in 1738, and six months afterwards started on his famous Continental tour with Horace Walpole. They began their travels on terms of closest friendship, but two years and a half of close companionship gave birth to differences which parted them in 1741, to come together again in three years' time into a renewal of intimacy only broken by death. In November, 1741, Gray's father died, having before his death succeeded in squandering all his possessions. Mrs. Gray wound-up her business in Cornhill, and came to live with her sister, Mrs. Rogers, at the farmhouse in Stoke Poges, where Stoke Court now stands. Here, in June, 1842—the month and year that West ("Favonius") died—Gray made his first of many visits to Stoke Poges. At that time the old manor house still stood in its original shape as built in 1555 by the Earl of Huntingdon, and was occupied by Viscount Cobham. Mrs. Rogers' house, where Gray stayed with his mother, was at West End, some three-quarters of a mile from the church Gray afterwards made so famous. In those days it was a two-

storeyed farmhouse, of which the stone fireplace with "1648" engraved on it, Gray's bed-room, and the window at which he sat, alone remain in their original condition.

On a slope some little distance from the house there still exists the arbour in which Gray "used to sit and dream," and the scene around is still as calm and remote from all the busy stir of life as when Gray described himself as "still at Stoke, hearing, seeing, doing absolutely nothing." It was in this year, however, that he laid the foundations of his fame. *Exegi monumentum ære perennius* might have been said by Gray if he could have looked into the secrets of the future, for it was in November, 1742, that he began the "Elegy." In August he had written his "Ode to Spring"—famous for "a solitary fly"—an ode that sounded the note of revolt against the dominion of the couplet, a sonnet to the memory of West, his "Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College," and the "Ode on Adversity."

In October or November, brooding perhaps over the late death of his friend West, and inspired by the quiet rusticity of his surroundings, he began the poem which more than all others has made his name famous. His uncle, Jonathan Rogers, died at Stoke Poges on October 31st, 1742, and was buried in the neighbouring parish of Burnham. There seems to be little doubt that it was very soon after that date that Gray began the composition of the "Elegy," though it was not actually finished till the year 1750. Some jealous souls would try to prove that "the country church-

yard" is not that of Stoke Poges. It is enough to remember that Gray began the "Elegy" when residing at Stoke Poges, that for many years he spent his vacations at Stoke Poges, that his aunt and his mother were both buried at Stoke Poges,



and that if he knew any country churchyard well that was the one.

It was in 1750, some few months after his aunt's burial at Stoke, that he wrote to Walpole: "I have been here at Stoke a few days, and having put an

end to a thing whose beginning you have seen long ago, I immediately send it to you." Its beginning was at Stoke, at Stoke were added the final touches, the "Weary Ploughman's" descendants still plough the Stoke furrows, and in the Tower the "Moping Owl" still rears its brood. There may be some doubt as to the real birthplace of Homer, but none as to the country churchyard in which the "Elegy" was "wrote." From this year (the year 1742) begins the second period of Gray's life. Forced by circumstances and the want of money to give up his original idea of reading for the Bar, he decided to live at Cambridge, spending all his spare time with his mother and aunt at Stoke. He returned to Peterhouse, and devoted all his hours to study; he deserted his "Muse," and for five years read Greek and little else. In 1747, at Walpole's persuasion, he published his "Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College," but it met with scant appreciation. In 1747 also he immortalised Walpole's cat in a poem that was "rather too long for an epitaph," but not too long to delight the lovers of "happy trifles." In 1749 his aunt died, and was buried at Stoke, and shortly afterwards he finished the "Elegy." Walpole received a copy, and showed it to his friends, and among others to Lady Cobham (then living at the manor house), who had little idea, till she was told by the Rev. Robert Pultney, that "a wicked imp they call a poet" had been for some years living in her parish. Feminine curiosity was aroused, and two messengers of Fate, in the shape of Lady Schaub and Miss Speed

(Lady Cobham's niece), invaded the shy poet's retreat, only to find him out. A note was left, the fish rose to the fly, and thus began Gray's intimacy with Lady Cobham, and literature was enriched by a story not too long. The "Long Story," redolent of quiet humour, was written in August, 1750, but not published (except privately) during Gray's lifetime. The "Elegy" was published by Dodsley in 1751, and rapidly went through fifteen editions, meeting with ready appreciation everywhere. Criticism of such a poem would here be out of place, but what was written of it by Dr. Johnson, who had a very poor opinion of Gray's merits as a poet, is interesting: "It abounds with images which find a mirror in every mind, and with sentiments to which every bosom returns an echo. The four stanzas beginning 'Yet ev'n these bones' are to me original: I have never seen the notions in any other place; yet he that reads them here persuades himself that he has always felt them. Had Gray written often thus, it had been vain to blame and useless to praise him."

The year 1753 saw the first appearance of a collection of Gray's poems in the shape of "The Six Poems, by T. Gray," published by R. Bentley, and containing a portrait of the poet. The same year Mrs. Gray died, and was buried at Stoke, her son composing the epitaph, which may still be read: "In the same pious confidence, beside her friend and sister, here sleep the remains of Dorothy Gray, widow, the careful mother of many children, one of whom alone had the misfortune to survive her." His mother's

death left Gray with a sufficient competence to enable him to live on at Cambridge in the simple fashion he loved best ; and, except for occasional visits to friends and tours to Scotland and the Lakes, and a three years' stay in London, the rest of his life was spent in that town.

In 1754 he wrote the "Progress of Poesy," which quickly brought him to the front as a master of English lyrics, and the following year he began "The Bard." A silly freak of some undergraduates at Peterhouse, who knew of Gray's constitutional terror of fire, led him to leave his rooms at that college and accept the welcome willingly offered him at Pembroke, where, for the last fifteen years of his life, he spent his time quietly and happily among his books and his flowers. Some concerts given at Cambridge by John Parry, the famous blind harper, set "all his learned body a dancing," and spurred him on to the completion of "The Bard." There was now no living poet who approached him either in the estimation of the public or of the literary world ; and on Colley Cibber's death, in 1757, he was offered the post of Poet Laureate. Partly from a disinclination to be "at war with the little fry of his own profession," he thought fit to decline. In 1758 his aunt (Mrs. Rogers) died at Stoke, and Gray then shut up West End Farm, only visiting the village rarely during the rest of his life.

The three next years he spent in London, living in Southampton-row, close to the British Museum, then in its infancy, but even in its earliest days a real

treasure to a student such as Gray. It was at this time that some friends of his thought, and perhaps hoped, that he would marry Lady Cobham's niece, Miss Speed. He confined himself, however, to writing her a sonnet, which has but little of the ring of a successful wooer, and gave himself up to his books and his friends.

In 1762 the post of Professor of Modern History and Modern Languages at Cambridge fell vacant, and Gray's friends tried, but in vain, to secure his election. Other influences were more powerful, and it was not till 1768 that he was elected to the only post he ever seems to have coveted. During the next few years he took great interest in Icelandic literature, and the "Descent of Odin" and the "Fatal Sisters" show what time he must have bestowed upon his study of a new and difficult language. Few events ruffled the even tenor of his last years. Travels in the south, travels in the north of England, an occasional visit to Mason at York, and a short tour in the Highlands occupied his vacations ; while his time at Cambridge slipped happily along, cheered by his friendship with Nicholls and Bonstetten, whose frankness, gaiety, and love of literature did much to enliven Gray's last two years.

For some time his health had been poor, and a visit to London in May, 1771, did him little good. Troubled with gout, neuralgia, and an incessant cough, he went back to Cambridge in July, after paying his last visit to Walpole. On July 24th he was taken seriously ill while at dinner in hall

at Pembroke, and after five days' illness he passed quietly away, comforted at the end by the presence of Mary Antrobus, his niece. On August 5th he was, according to his own desire, buried in the churchyard he loved, "in the vault made by my late dear mother"; and there he lies, with only a simple stone on the church wall opposite to mark the place. Erected by John Penn, there is a monument, only interesting through the verses inscribed upon it; and the best memorial to Gray is the spirit which yearly brings hundreds of visitors to gaze upon his tomb.

The following is a record of the chief points of interest in Gray's life :

Dec. 26, 1716.—Born.

Circa 1727.—Entered at Eton.

1734.—Entered at Pembroke Hall, Cambridge; migrates on July 3 to Peterhouse.

1736.—Visits Burnham.

1738.—Leaves Cambridge for his father's house in London.

1739.—Starts with Horace Walpole on the grand tour.

Nov. 6, 1741.—His father dies.

1742.—Mrs. Gray and Mary Antrobus, her sister, go to live with their sister, Mrs. Rogers, at West End Farm, Stoke Poges. June 1st.—West died. Gray at Stoke Poges. "Ode to Spring," "Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College" written. The "Elegy" begun (not finished till June 12, 1750), soon after funeral of Mr. Rogers on Oct. 31. In December Gray takes his bachelor's degree, and begins his residence at Peterhouse, Cambridge, as a bachelor. "Hymn to Ignorance" probably written in this month.

- 1744.—Reconciliation with Horace Walpole. Pope dies.
- 1747.—“Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College” published anonymously by Dodsley. Gray meets Hogarth at dinner at Walpole's. Writes “Ode on the Death of a Favourite Cat,” “’Twas on a lofty vase's side.”
- 1748.—Gray's house in Cornhill was burnt down. “A Collection of Poems” published by Dodsley, the second volume containing Gray's odes “To Spring,” “On Mr. Walpole's Cat,” and the “Eton Ode.”
- 1749.—Mrs. Mary Antrobus dies at Stoke, Nov. 5. Gray writes some more of the “Elegy” at Cambridge.
- 1750.—Gray finishes the “Elegy” at Stoke Poges, on June 12, first edition being printed without any pause between the stanzas. Beginning of friendship with Lady Cobham and Miss Speed. Wrote the “Long Story” in August.
- Feb. 16, 1751.—Dodsley publishes the “Elegy”; four editions in two months; fifteen authorised editions by 1762.
- 1753.—First edition published of “Designs by Mr. R. Bentley from Six Poems by Mr. T. Gray, containing the ‘Ode to Spring,’ ‘Ode on the Death of a Favourite Cat,’ third edition of the ‘Eton Ode,’ the ‘Long Story,’ ‘Hymn to Adversity,’ twelfth edition of the ‘Elegy.’” This edition contains a sketch of Gray from life, and sketches of Lady Schaub, Mr. Purt, and Miss Speed.
- Mar. 11, 1753.—Mrs. Gray dies.
- 1754.—The “Ode on Vicissitude” begun, but never finished. The “Progress of Poesy” finished in December.
- 1755.—“The Bard” begun, finished in 1757.
- 1756.—Gray leaves Peterhouse for Pembroke in February.
- 1757.—“The Bard” finished. Gray's odes printed at Horace Walpole's press at Strawberry Hill; 2000 copies published by Dodsley. Gray receives forty guineas, *the only money he ever gained by his*

writings. Colley Cibber dies. The office of Poet Laureate offered to Gray by the Duke of Devonshire, and refused.

1758.—Mrs. Rogers dies at Stoke Poges in September.

1759.—Gray closes West End Farm. Leaves Stoke Poges, after spending his vacations there for seventeen successive years, and settles in Southampton-row, London, for three years. Sept. 12.—Wolfe recites the "Elegy" while being rowed to Quebec. "I would prefer being the author of that poem to the glory of beating the French to-morrow."

1760.—Lady Cobham dies. Gray corresponds with Macpherson (Ossian); meets Nicholls.

1762.—Returns to Cambridge.

1763.—Begins his study of Icelandic literature. Writes the "Fatal Sisters," the "Descent of Odin," the "Triumphs of Owen."

1764.—Gray's health begins to fail. Writes the "Candidate" and "Tophet." Tour in the South of England.

1765.—Tour in the North of England and Scotland. Health improves.

1768.—Dodsley republishes Gray's poems in a cheap form; 2250 copies sold. Foulis, of Glasgow, also publishes an edition. Gray elected Professor of Modern History, &c., at Cambridge.

1769.—The "Installation Ode" written on the Duke of Grafton succeeding the Duke of Newcastle as Chancellor of the University. Gray's last work. Tour to the Lakes. Beginning of friendship with Bonstetten.

1771.—May.—Gray goes to London. July 22.—Returns to Cambridge. July 30—Dies after five days' illness.

The writer of this short sketch of Gray's life begs to acknowledge the great debt he owes to Mr. E. W.

Gosse's life of Gray in the "English Men of Letters" series. No better account of Gray can be found. All lovers of Gray should also read his letters, of which several editions have been published. Mason's edition was first published in 1775; Mitford published a better text in 1816; but the best is the latest edited by E. Gosse, and published by Macmillan.

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